

Title: Device for Loading Substrates into and Unloading Them from a Clean Room

Field of The Invention

[Specification]

The present invention relates to a device for loading and unloading substrates into or from a clean room having a lock device, on which a transport box can be brought for receiving the substrates and which is provided with a hermetically sealed opening, and which has a processing installation adjoining the locking opening [in accordance with the preamble of claim 1].

Background of the Invention

With known devices of this type, the processing installation has a manipulating device, by means of which the substrates can be brought from [they] a transport box into the processing installation or vice versa, when the transport box is docked at [the] a lock opening. The exact position of the transport box with [in] respect to the manipulating device, and therefore the processing installation, is important here. This orientation is performed once in a relatively extensive manner during the installation of the device. If now the lock device must be exchanged for whatever reason[s], another elaborate adjustment of the exchanged lock device with [in] respect to the processing installation is necessary.

Summary of the Invention

It is therefore the object of the present invention to provide [create] a device for loading and unloading substrates into or from a clean room of the type mentioned at the outset, wherein an adjustment of the lock device [in] with respect to the processing installation, which is still

applicable in case of an exchange of the lock device, is possible.

To attain this object[, the characteristics recited in claim 1 are provided] in a device for loading and unloading substrates into or from a clean room of the type mentioned at the outset, an adapter device is provided which is arranged between the processing installation and the lock device, on which the lock device can be releasably fastened and which is held on the processing installation and can be adjustably oriented with respect thereto.

It can be achieved by means of the measures in accordance with the present invention that the frame-like adapter device needs to be oriented or adjusted [in] with respect to the position of the processing device or its manipulating device only once, since then this adapter device always remains and is used as a once adjusted receiver for the lock device. This saves considerable outlay in work and time in case the lock device needs to be exchanged for another one, for example following an error indication.

It is achieved in an advantageous manner [by means of the characteristics of claim 2] that the adapter device can be adjusted [in] with respect to the processing device in [the] a desired direction, or in practically all conceivable ones, i.e. placed vertically or horizontally, for example.

[The characteristics in accordance with claim 3 are provided for] For setting the adapter device in the Z-direction, or for tilting it around the X-axis. The underside of the adapter is connected with two spaced apart, height-adjustable forcing screws which are held on a stationary element.

A setting around the Y-axis, in the direction of the X- and Y-axis, or the like, is achieved by the provision of adjustable forcing screws which are supported on a component of the processing installation [means of the characteristics in accordance with claim 4].

[The characteristics in accordance with claim 6 are provided for] For the appropriate fixation of the setting fastening screws are provided which pass through bores of larger diameter.

The connection of the respective lock device with the adapter device is achieved in a quick and simple manner by means of spaced apart indexing pins, which can be fittingly and essentially free of play plugged into receiving bores of the lock device [the characteristics in accordance with claim 7]. A simple exchangeability of the lock device results from the fact that the lock device has a base plate which has a bore pattern corresponding to the arrangement of the indexing pins in the adaptor device [characteristics in accordance with claim 8].

In a further embodiment[, the characteristics in accordance with claim 9 are provided,] which makes possible a quick and simple pre-positioned placement of a transport box on the receiving table, which is displaceable, i.e. it can be docked at the lock opening, a roller track is provided in the area of the receiving table. If in the course of pivoting the roller track, preferably + 90° and providing vertically upward extending lateral insertion slopes [this the characteristics in accordance with claim 10 and/or 11 are provided], the transport box can be brought in a simple manner on the roller track from two or three lateral directions, as well as from above, and therefore on the receiving table. A defined holding position of the transport box on the roller track results from inclining the roller track slightly in the direction toward the processing installation, or toward a loading and unloading level [the characteristics in accordance with claim 12].

It is structurally useful if the roller track is embodied to have two parallel track elements connected by a loop and extending on both sides of the receiving table [in accordance with the characteristics of claim 13]. Useful further embodiments of the roller track therefore result from

[the characteristics of one or several of claims 14 to 16] connecting the connecting loop to a lever whose other end is pivotably mounted on a vertical shaft, with the lever pivot shaft being displaceable in height.

In a further embodiment of the present invention, an advantageous construction in accordance with [the characteristics of claim 17] the provision of a lock door which can be connected with a cover is provided for the ability of hermetically sealing the lock opening by means of the lock door. Constructive embodiments ensue [when the characteristics in accordance with claim 18 and/or 19 are present] by the provision of a clutch disk connected with a parallelogram device, which is moved by a motor-driven worm-gear. The parallelogram drive has a hinged connecting rod from which a manual lever projects, and which is accessible from the outside.

Advantages in regard to constructive and technical labor outlay result from the closing movement of the lock door, the displacement movement of the receiving table and the lowering movement of the receiving table and the lowering movement of the roller track are derived from a similar crank drive, with the drive for these movements arranged inside the lock device. [if the characteristics in accordance with claim 20 and/or 21 are provided.]

Further details of the present invention can be taken from the following description, in which the present invention is described in greater detail and explained by means of the exemplary embodiment represented in the drawings. [Shown are in:]

Brief Descriptions of the Drawings

Fig. 1, is a lateral view in partial section of a device for loading and unloading substrates

into or from a clean room in accordance with a preferred exemplary embodiment of the present invention,

Fig. 2, is a plan view along the line II - II in Fig. 1 in a partial broken representation.

Fig. 3, is a plan view in partial section in accordance with the arrow III in Fig. 1,

Fig. 4, is a view from above in accordance with the arrow IV in Fig. 1, but without the transport box, and

Fig. 5, is a section along the line V - V in Fig. 1.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

In accordance with Figs. 1 and 2, the device 10 for loading and unloading substrates 11 into or from a clean room 12 has a lock device 14, which holds or receives a transport box 13 with the substrates 11, for transferring or receiving the substrates 11 to or from a processing installation 16, which forms the clean room 12 and has, in a manner not represented, a manipulating device for receiving or transferring the substrates 11 from or to the transport box 13.

The device 10 has an adapter device 20, which is arranged between the lock device 14 and the processing installation 16, for the vertical and horizontal adjustment of the lock device 14 [in] with respect to the processing installation 16, independently of their possibly not exactly vertically and/or horizontally aligned positions. The adapter device 20 has a base plate 25, which is provided with an upper opening 24 and a lower opening 23. The base plate 25 rests adjustably on a strip 26, which is fixed in place and here is a part of the processing installation 16, and on which two vertical forcing screws 27, which are provided with spherical rollers 22, are supported and

are held at a distance from an angle element 21 of the base plate, and can be vertically screwed in or out. The base plate 25 can be displaced on the strip 26 in the horizontal X-direction, as well as in the Y-direction, which extends transversely [in] with respect to it. By means of the displaceability of each one of the forcing screws 27, the base plate 25 can also be moved in the vertical Z-direction and can be inclined [in] with respect to it. In an upper and a lower area 22 and 23, the base plate 25 is provided with forcing screws 29, which are arranged at a distance and can be screwed in or out and in the mounted state are supported on a surface of the processing installation 16. An alignment of the base plate 25 [in] with respect to the processing installation 16 can take place by adjusting each one of the forcing screws 29, wherein a pivot movement of the base plate 25 [in] with respect to the X- and/or the Y-axes is possible.

The base plate 25 has bores 33 of large diameter near the forcing screws 29, through which fastening screws 34 of smaller diameter pass, which can be screwed into threaded bores 36 of an adjoining part of the processing installation 16, and whose head is supported on a washer 37 (Fig.4). Because of this, an adjustment, for example in the mm range, is possible, and the position of the adapter device 20, which is adjusted in respect to the processing installation 16, can be fixed in place.

Here, the base plate 25 of the adapter device 20 is equipped with indexing pins 32 and threaded bores 42, for example four. A vertical base plate 40 of the lock device 14 has bores 41 in a corresponding bore pattern for the essentially play-free receipt of the indexing pins 32 and screws 35 for screwing into the threaded bore 42.

Because of the adjustment of the adapter device 20 [in] with respect to the processing installation 16, and the releasably pluggable connection with the lock device 14, it is possible

without any further adjustment measures to replace the lock device 14 with another lock device, which is provided with the same bore pattern on its base plate 40. Here, the base plate 40 and the base plate 25 lie flat against each other.

In accordance with Fig. 1, the lock device 14 has a housing 43, whose front is closed off by the base plate 40, which extends past the top of the housing 43. The upper cover of the housing 43 is formed by a support plate 44, above which a receiving table 45 for the transport box 13 is held. In a manner still to be described, the receiving table 45 can be moved back and forth with [in] respect to the vertical base plate 40 and can be docked against the latter with the transport box 13.

The base plate 40 has a lock window 46, which is aligned with the coaxial opening 24 of the base plate 25, both of which can be closed by means of a lock door 47. The transport box 13 has an opening 48 coaxially with the lock window 46, which can be hermetically sealed by means of a cover 49. The transport box 13 is displaced toward the base plate 40 for receiving or transferring the substrates 11 from or to the transport box 13. In a manner yet to be described, the cover 49 is unlocked from the transport box 13 with the aid of the lock door 47, is removed and connected with the lock door 47. Once the lock door 47 with the cover 49 is moved out of the area of the lock window 46, the substrates 11 can be removed from the transport box 13 with the aid of the manipulation device, not represented, and brought to the processing installation 16 (into the clean room 12), or vice versa. It is understood that, following the loading of the transport box 13, the cover 49 is connected with the transport box 13 in a correspondingly reverse manner for the hermetic sealing of the opening 48 of the latter, and is unlocked from the lock door 47 and removed.

All drive and transfer elements necessary for the movement of the receiving table 45 and the lock door 47 are arranged inside the housing 43 of the lock device 14. A gear motor, not represented, is flanged to the underside or inside of the support plate 44 and is connected via a crank gear 52 with the receiving table 45 for moving the latter horizontally back and forth. For this purpose the crank gear 52 has a crank roller, which engages a lower circular groove of the receiving table 45, so that the receiving table 45 can be moved along rails.

A threaded spindle 57 is seated in the support plate 44, which extends vertically downward and can be driven at its bottom by a gear motor 58. A carriage housing 59 can be moved up and down along the threaded spindle 57 via a nut 61. The carriage housing 59, open toward the base plate 40, receives the horizontal portion of an L-shaped arm 62, on whose vertical arm end the lock door is fastened. Facing away from the nut 61, the carriage housing 59 has a carriage 63, which is guided, vertically displaceable, along a vertical guide 64, which is held on the base plate 40. The end of the horizontal portion of the L-shaped arm 62, which passes through the opening 23 of the base plate 25 and an opening 39 of the base plate 40, is embodied as a carriage 65, which is guided, horizontally displaceable back and forth, on a horizontal guide 66 of the carriage housing 59. The horizontal displacement of the L-shaped arm 62 takes place by means of a gear motor 67 flanged to the carriage housing 59, which drives a crank gear 68, whose crank roller loosely engages a circular groove of the carriage portion 65 of the L-shaped arm 62. In this way the lock door 47 is horizontally moved toward and away from the lock window 46 or the opening 24 with the aid of the gear motor 67, while the L-shaped arm 62, and therefore the lock door 47, can be moved with the aid of the gear motor 58 in the vertical direction out of or into the area of the lock window 46.

In accordance with Figs. 1, 3 and 4, the lock device 14 has a roller track 75 in the area of the receiving table 45, which has parallel roller strips 77 equipped with rollers 76 on both longitudinal sides of the receiving table 45. The two roller strips 77 are rigidly connected with each other by means of an arched U-shaped rail 78. In a center area between the two roller strips 77, the U-shaped rail 78 is fixedly connected with the upper end of an angular lever 79, whose vertical portion is conducted through the support plate 44, and whose lower horizontal return portion supports a bearing bushing [bush] 81 on its free end, through which a vertical shaft 82 is passed. The support plate 44 is provided with a semicircular recess 83, which the lever 79 penetrates and whose radius corresponds to the pivot radius of the lever 79 around the shaft 82. The shaft 82 receiving the bearing bushing [bush] 81 is guided up and down in the vertical direction on a stationary guide 84. The pivot movement and the vertical up and down movement of the lever 79 are performed, partially not represented, by means of a motor. The lifting motion of the roller track 75 is for example provided by the already mentioned arrangement of the gear motor 71 and the crank gear 72. By means of the pivot movement of the lever 79 around the shaft 82, the roller track 75 can be brought out of a position oriented toward the base plate 40 or the lock window 46 into a position moved in one or the other pivot direction by 90°. In this way a transport box 13 can be brought horizontally on the roller track 75 from three directions, which are located vertically in respect to each other, or any arbitrary positions between these. The roller strips 77 of the roller track 75 have vertically upward extending insertion slopes 86, for example in each of two distanced areas, which make the placement of a transport box 13 on the roller track 75 from above possible. By depositing or rolling a transport box up on the roller track 75, pre-positioning of the transport box in respect to the receiving table 45 has been achieved.

Because of the guide 84 for the shaft 82, the roller track 75 can be raised or lowered with [in] respect to the receiving table 45. In the raised position (Fig. 1), a transport box 13 is placed on the roller track 75 or moved away from it or lifted off. In the lowered position (Fig. 3), Fixation pins 87 provided on the receiving table 45 and arranged at a distance from each other engage corresponding blind receiver bores 88 on the underside of the transport box 13, so that the exact positioning of the transport box 13 on the receiving table 45 is achieved. In the exemplary embodiment represented, there are three fixation pins 87 arranged in a triangle, for example.

The two roller strips 77 of the roller track 75 are provided with a slight descending slope in such a way that an inclination in respect to the docking or loading level 89 is achieved, wherein one or both roller strips 77 are provided with a stop 90 on this end.

Fig. 5 shows the locking mechanism for or of the cover 49 with the transport box 13. Two spaced apart T-shaped keys 91 are pivotably maintained on respective stationary shafts 92. They are driven by a gear motor 93, which is connected with a worm wheel 96 via a coupling 94 and a worm shaft 95. A clutch disk 97 is frictionally connected with the worm wheel 96 and is connected, fixed against relative rotation, with a first crank lever 98, which is connected via a hinged rod 99 with a second crank lever 98'. A parallelogram gear is achieved in this way. The movement of the hinged rod 99 is limited by stops 100 and 100', which are equipped with limit switches. The hinged rod 99 has a lever shoulder 101 approximately at the center, which is laterally conducted toward the outside of the cover 49 and which, in case of the loss of the motor drive, makes it possible to perform or finish the opening or closing process manually against the frictional resistance of the blocked gear and the natural opening or closing force. The shoulder 101 is conducted through a lateral opening of the lock door 47, and it can be actuated via a bolt

102 connected with it. It can be seen that this locking mechanism is arranged inside the lock door 47, so that it is axially connected with or released from the keys 91 when the cover 49 is set down or lifted.